



PECFN NEWSLETTER

January 2023



Wild Turkey
photo by Paul Jones

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PECFN MEMBERS' MEETING, TUESDAY, JANUARY 31, 2023, 7 PM, via ZOOM

PAMELA STAGG, "ANCIENT DNA: THE NEXT FRONTIER"

Ancient environmental DNA is rewriting what we know about prehistory -- back as far as millions of years ago. But what is ancient environmental DNA? Think of it as ghost DNA -- genes that survive in soil under permafrost, centuries after an animal or plant has become extinct. This DNA can even tell us about the evolution of animals, climate change and the movement of continents, millions of years ago. Pamela Stagg has spoken to many paleontologists., paleobotanists and paleogeneticists to explore the latest research in the fascinating field.

Pamela Stagg is known as "The Bird Lady" in Prince Edward County. That's a tribute to her radio program, "The County, Naturally," which teaches adults about nature.

In her previous life as a botanical painter, Pamela won the world's top prize for botanical painting, the Royal Horticultural Society's Gold Medal. Recently, her work was included in the exhibition, Modern Masters of Botanical Art at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, in Great Britain.

Kayaking is her passion, particularly when it involves Yukon's glacial lakes. She is also a keen bird-watcher.



PECFN General Members Meeting on Zoom

Tuesday February 21st at 7:00PM

Phillip Mercier – Bander-In-Charge at PEPtBO

Why is Prince Edward Point so important for Migration?



Phil Mercier at Prince Edward Point

Phillip Mercier is best known to us as the Bander in Charge at Prince Edward Point Bird Observatory. He is an Environmental Biologist, having studied at McGill and is a professional bird bander and ornithologist. He is probably the best thing to have happened at PEPtBO in a long time. Aside from his knowledge and experience, his enthusiasm, patience and sense of humour has gained the respect of everyone at the Bird Observatory.

Phillip is going to talk about the Prince Edward Point and why it is such an important area for migration, as well as some info about some of the rare and endangered birds that pass through.



Photos:
 Top left is Phil with Bander Jessica Bao
 Top right is setting up for MAPS monitoring in the summer
 Bottom right is Phil setting up MAPS
 Bottom middle is Jessica Daze Assistant Bander in Charge last year

PECFN MEMBERS' MEETING, TUESDAY, MARCH 28, 2023, 7 PM

VIA ZOOM

OUR URBAN FOREST: A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT

Jennifer Gagné



The urban forest is essential to wildlife, human health and our economy. Yet, challenges such as development, forest pests and extreme weather events are making their sustainable management increasingly difficult. While other municipal infrastructure is managed with the utmost care, the urban forest - which is key green infrastructure - typically takes a back seat. In this presentation, we'll look at the steps and indicators in urban forest management planning. Not only from the authority of the municipality but as a collaborative approach between government, environmental organizations, community, indigenous groups and professionals in and around Prince Edward County.

Jennifer Gagné has a master's degree in forest conservation and has worked in urban forestry for over 10 years. With previous experience in government and not-for-profit, she now works as a consulting arborist and part-time instructor.

Eighth Annual Sandbanks Christmas Bird Count - December 20, 2022

Tyler Hoar, Sandbanks CBC compiler,

No. of participants: 25 observers in the field
No. of species seen: 80 - slightly below the average of 84
No. of individuals: 16,011 - above the average of 14,803

New species for the count: Ruby-crowned Kinglet (This brings the all-time count total to 135 species)

Record high counts: Mallard (529), Horned Grebe (11), Barred Owl (7), Red-bellied Woodpecker (39), Downy Woodpecker (47), Blue Jay (322), Red-breasted Nuthatch (29), White-breasted Nuthatch (80), and European Starling (3926).

High counts (record tying): Lesser Black-backed Gull (1), Pileated Woodpecker (9)

High counts but not records: Common Merganser, Red-tailed Hawk, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Snow Bunting, American Tree Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, and Northern Cardinal

Other unusual species seen: Purple Sandpiper (1), Red-shouldered Hawk (1) and Carolina Wren (1)

Low Counts: Tundra Swan (3), Ruffed Grouse (5) Turkey Vulture (11) and Ring-billed Gull (51)

Misses (i.e. not seen): Snowy Owl - First time in the history of this count.
Belted Kingfisher missed twice previously.
Winter Wren only missed once previously.
Common Grackle only missed once previously.
Yellow-rumped Warbler only missed once previously.

Winter Finches were low due to the lack of locally available food: 12 Purple Finches and 9 Common Redpolls

Thanks to everyone for helping out this year.

Barred Owl



photo Paul Jones



Red-shouldered Hawk photo Paul Jones

During their survey of the Charwell Point area of the Point Petre Provincial Wildlife Area, on the Sandbanks CBC, Paul Jones and Dale Smith, observed (and Paul photographed) a Purple Sandpiper along the shore. These shorebirds generally travel singly during fall migration and are regarded as a very special sighting in the late fall on the Great Lakes – often being observed in very adverse weather, usually blustery and damp, but it is always a highlight to see them. Several years ago another was seen at Point Petre, also during the Sandbanks CBC and many were able to observe and photograph it feeding along the rocky, wave-battered shore at the Point on a very wet day in December. This year the weather was sunny and cool but the walk down Lighthall Rd. to the Lake was a long one that few others made.



The common name refers to a seldom-seen purple sheen on some of the wing feathers, particularly of the summer plummage. Purple Sandpipers breed on the arctic tundra and spend their winters on North Atlantic shores, farther north than any other shorebird. It's a rare bird locally, so this was an exciting find. Dropping water levels on Lake Ontario have stranded millions of invasive Quagga Mussels on shore, providing a good source of food for this hardy shorebird.

Purple Sandpiper photo Paul Jones



Prince Edward Point Christmas Bird Count 2022

Twenty-four enthusiastic citizen scientists headed out early December 17th on the forty-sixth Prince Edward Point Christmas Bird Count. The count circle is centered on Waupoos Island in Prince Edward Bay and stretches along the water from Point Traverse of the Prince Edward National Wildlife Area to across the Bay of Quinte near Adolphustown.

For a count day, the weather was good. The high temperature was 2C with only light NW winds. Snow cover ranged from none, to off and on whiteouts in the PEPNWA.

Even though the weather was good, the count of 67 species only equaled the average of 67 and the total of only 6,449 birds counted was well below the average of 31,566. Counts of common water birds like Long-tailed Duck (957) and Greater Scaup (0) contribute to this low tally and they were starkly lower than their respective averages of 18,885 and 3,453. Large rafts of waterfowl were seen off shore but were too far away to identify. Also, due to a late cancellation, zone 3B along County Road 8, was not counted.

Except for House Finches and American Goldfinches, finches were basically non-existent. One Great Horned Owl was found on count day.

On a more positive note, the tally for American Robin at 382 was well above the 45-year average of 147. Similarly, the 358 Cedar Waxwings was more than twice the yearly average of 164. It was also nice to see that the count for Bald Eagles (15) continues its upward trend from an average of only 4. Other species that are not always seen on this count included Merlin, both Red-winged (4) and Rusty Blackbirds (3), and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (2). Highlights of count week included an additional Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Hermit Thrush, and Barred Owl.

Thanks to all of the volunteers and especially to the team leaders, Paul Mackenzie, Barry Pinsky, Amy Bodman, Greg Forbes, Cheryl Anderson, Tom Wheatley and Tyler Hoar.

Dale Smith
December, 2022.

PEC Christmas Bird Count Data Form - Dec. 17, 2022

Area Number: 3A Area Leader: Amy Bodman Email: amy.bodman@gmail.com
 Team Members: To Receive Results include email addresses
Sandra Doves: centuryhorse@gmail.com; Joanne Dewey: dewjkn@gmail.com
 Coverage (If your group splits, please record additional distance/time details for the other group at the bottom of this form)
 GROUP 1 - Start Time: 7:50 Finish Time: 3:30

Distance: Owling _____ km Car 55 km Foot 6 km Other _____ km
 Time: Owling _____ hr Car 4.5 hr Foot 2.5 hr Other _____ hr

SPECIES and TOTALS			
Canada Goose	<u>110</u>	Great Horned Owl	_____
Mute Swan	<u>9</u>	Snowy owl	_____
Tundra Swan	<u>16</u>	Barred Owl	_____
American Black Duck	<u>1</u>	Belted Kingfisher	_____
Mallard	<u>21</u>	Red-bellied Woodpecker	<u>6</u>
Ring-necked Duck	_____	Downy Woodpecker	<u>5</u>
Greater Scaup	_____	Hairy Woodpecker	<u>1</u>
Lesser Scaup	_____	Northern Flicker	<u>2</u>
sculp species	_____	Pileated Woodpecker	_____
White-winged Scoter	_____	American Kestrel	_____
Bufflehead	<u>36</u>	Merlin	_____
Common Goldeneye	<u>60</u>	Peregrine Falcon	_____
Hooded Merganser	<u>120</u>	Northern Shrike	_____
Common Merganser	<u>100</u>	Blue Jay	<u>60</u>
Red-breasted Merganser	<u>100</u>	American Crow	<u>100</u>
Ruffed Grouse	<u>1</u>	Common Raven	<u>1</u>
Wild Turkey	_____	Horned Lark	_____
Common Loon	<u>1</u>	Black-capped Chickadee	<u>49</u>
Double-cr. Cormorant	_____	Red-breasted Nuthatch	<u>1</u>
Great Blue Heron	_____	White-breasted Nuthatch	<u>8</u>
Northern Harrier	_____	Brown Creeper	_____
Sharp-shinned Hawk	<u>1</u>	Winter Wren	_____
Cooper's Hawk	<u>1</u>	Golden-crowned Kinglet	_____
Northern Goshawk	_____	Eastern Bluebird	_____
accipiter species	_____	American Robin	<u>55</u>
Bald Eagle	<u>4</u> +	Northern Mockingbird	_____
Red-tailed Hawk	<u>1</u>	European Starling	<u>70</u>
Rough-legged Hawk	_____	Bohemian Waxwing	_____
hawk species	_____	Cedar Waxwing	<u>35</u>
Ring-billed Gull	<u>5</u>	Snow Bunting	_____
Herring Gull	<u>90</u>	Yellow-rumped Warbler	_____
Iceland Gull	_____	American Tree Sparrow	<u>4</u>
Glaucous Gull	_____	Chipping Sparrow	_____
Great Black-backed Gull	_____	Dark-eyed Junco	<u>33</u>
gull species	_____	White-throated Sparrow	_____
Rock Pigeon	<u>10</u>	Song Sparrow	_____
Mourning Dove	<u>20</u>	Swamp Sparrow	_____
Eastern Screech-owl	_____	sparrow species	_____
		Northern Cardinal	<u>4</u>

No. of species: 37
 including Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
 Additional Species/Notes:
 (Including count week new species Dec 16-22)
 - Swan sp 7 (no scope)
 * we may have seen one of the Bald Eagles twice (abt. 2km away)
 - Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 2



Brian Gable Globe and Mail

PROTESTING BILL 23

Bill 23 or the “More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022” was introduced by the Government of Ontario on October 25, 2022. It soon became clear that the Bill encouraged urban sprawl at a grave expense to the environment and prime farmland, and had very little to do with building affordable and sustainable homes for ordinary people. It was simply an ultra-generous gift to developers, while cutting up the Greenbelt, trashing wetlands and farmland, crippling Conservation Authorities, and attacking democracy. Within days of the announcement, protests sprung up all across Ontario. PECFN also quickly sprang into action and we held a protest rally in front of Todd Smith’s office on November 24. We had an overwhelming response from our community, with participation from other nature organizations, farmers, landscape architects, horticultural groups, 150 members of the public. We had some great speakers including Amy Bodman, John Hirsch, Jane Lesslie, Kate McNaughton, John Lowry, Lori Borthwick and many others. Lori Borthwick acted as the MC, and offered an open mic to all attendees. We collected about 120 signatures for a petition letter to Todd Smith in which we asked him to intervene with the premier to remove some of the most harmful points in the act, including changing the Ontario Wetlands Evaluation System, effectively removing provincial protection from 99 of our region’s 100 provincially significant wetlands.



About two weeks later, on December 10, we assisted and participated at a march called “Requiem for our Wetlands” organized by Lori Borthwick and the Quinte Field Naturalists. This event was also a great success, with close to 200 people participating, carrying signs with the names of each of our 99 lost wetlands and marching through downtown Belleville. We again collected signatures for a letter to Todd Smith.

Helen Fearman

A Letter to the Editor from PECFN:

Lehigh Cement has applied to add Alternative Low Carbon Fuels (ALCFs) to the fuels it uses to make cement.

The application is subject to public comments on the Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO) until Feb 6, 2023. (ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-6462.)

Most PEC residents are not aware of the added pollution this action will bring to our air. PECFN is submitting our concerns to the ERO and think that the public should be informed.

1. Lehigh Cement is intending to bring in new materials called alternative low-carbon fuels (ALCF) to supplement the regular fuel mix of coal, natural gas and petroleum coke. They would include biomass, wood from construction and demolition and non-recyclable paper and plastics, (Why are these materials not recyclable?) They would come from all over southern Ontario and also two Great Lakes states, industrial Michigan and New York. Invariably certain materials will be brought that cannot be burnt and will need to be recycled here.
2. Burning these materials would cause emissions of dioxins, furans, crystalline silica, iron, nitrogen oxides, hydrogen chloride, benzene, nickel, cobalt and particulate matter. Lehigh did not identify these emissions at the public meetings in the County. Why is burning them, knowing that these emissions will result, considered a solution to dealing with their presence? Who approves of burning of materials with such emissions expected? The answer is the Provincial Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.
3. The Ministry of the Environment should be aware that a study at a Cementa plant in Sweden found that when ALCFs were introduced the concentration of dioxins produced was higher than a previous sampling (before ALCFs were used). Lehigh Cement says: "Within Lehigh's own experience, we have studied this in other facilities. The cement process burns at very high temperatures and we have complete combustion which reduces the likelihood of furan and dioxin production." It would be nice if that was true but the study at the Cementa plant noted above actually concluded that high temperatures during combustion may have precisely the opposite effect on dioxin production. According to the Cementa plant study: the formation of dioxins were tested "in cement kilns at two different temperatures 255°C and 400°C. . .The dioxins were maximum at higher temperature and minimum at lower temperature suggesting that the temperature of the APCD should be minimum in order to decrease the formation of dioxins."
4. Not only that but according to Lehigh Cement's consultation report, 89 contaminants were assessed in total. Of these 89 contaminants, 42 were considered negligible and 14 contaminants were less than 1%. But this still leaves 47 contaminants unaccounted for. The emissions on the ERO posting show 8 contaminants, but why did only 8 end up being part of the approval? What about the other 39 contaminants? The public deserves answers, especially when Lehigh Cement will only be required under the terms of the approval to monitor the 8 contaminants listed on the ERO that would form part of the approval.
5. In addition, Lehigh is facing criminal charges relating to an explosion at the plant in September 2021. As reported by Quinte News on November 22, 2022, Lehigh Cement is now facing five charges under the Occupational Health and Safety Act. It's inappropriate for the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks to be considering approval of Lehigh Cement's ALCF application while these charges are before the court, and while the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development appears to be still conducting an investigation.
6. In our view, Lehigh Cement has not been fully transparent with the public, as seen in its failure to disclose the provision in O. Reg. 79/15 for a pilot (demonstration) project. Lehigh deliberately led people to believe that it was pursuing the standard process in place to burn ALCFs at its plant as set out in O. Reg. 79/15 and was following the normal process that all cement companies in Ontario were required to follow. All the while Lehigh was purporting to be complying with the requirements of O. Reg. 79/15 it was hiding the provision in the legislation that allowed them to test the ALCFs they'd be using first. *Cont'd next page*

Continued from previous page

The concern is not just that public was misled, it's also that the government appears to be prepared to be part of this deception in posting an approval that permits Lehigh Cement to use ALCFs on a permanent basis and lets Lehigh Cement off the hook to do testing. Surely, at the very least, the government is aware that this could set a precedent for other cement companies to do the same thing. After all, why would any cement company go through the hassle and expense of a pilot project when they can get approval on a permanent basis, with a few conditions attached?

7. We would urge anyone who is considering submitting a comment to read the Environmental Defence submission on O. Reg. 79/15. It's only four pages long and well worth the read. <https://environmentaldefence.ca/report/on-alternative-low-carbon-fuels/>

In the intro Environmental Defence makes clear that: "While we support the phasing out of coal use in Ontario, we believe the Alternative Fuels regulation does not provide enough controls regarding toxic emissions or public oversight to ensure that we are not replacing one problematic fuel with others."

Environment Defence goes on to observe that:

"Even under the current regulation, it is virtually impossible for communities living in the vicinity of a facility burning alternative fuels to find out, in real time, what is being emitted into the local airshed from the stacks. Because alternative fuels are waste products, the exact mix and composition of the fuel varies and therefore emissions vary accordingly. "

Strict requirements for pollution control and public reporting at cement plants should be implemented to provide the public with information on exposures and to ensure these facilities are limiting emissions of toxic substances to the greatest extent possible.

For the reasons above we oppose the approval of Lehigh Cement's application as presented.

Paula Peel and Myrna Wood, Prince Edward County Field Naturalists

Seedy Saturday

Saturday, February 25th,

10:00am-3:00 pm

place: the high-school in Picton.



Seedy Saturdays are fun, inexpensive events where you can swap and exchange seeds, get exciting varieties that other seed savers are sharing (as well as the ..stories that come with them), attend workshops and talks, meet vendors and buy seeds from seed companies. Whether you are a first-time or master gardener, seed enthusiast or expert seed saver, there really is something for everyone.. See PECFN and Tree the County at our table.

SUNDAY, JUNE 4

Indigenous Commemorative Medicine Wheel garden, in Cloyne, Ontario.

PECFN will visit the Land O' Lakes Garden Club for a tour of their Indigenous Commemorative Medicine Wheel garden, in Cloyne, Ontario. We will then attend a workshop given by Tawny Stowe, who provided guidance in the inception and realization of the garden. Tawny is a member of the Ontario Highlands Métis Association and founder of woodlandpriestess.com. Her workshop will lead us to appreciate the spiritual and medicinal qualities of four native plants: Tobacco, Sage, Cedar, and Sweetgrass.

Attendance is limited. More details for members will follow.



Cloyne Indigenous Commemorative Medicine Wheel garden, newly planted



Tawny Stowe at Cloyne



Wetland Plants
by Susan Banks

New Book from Susan Banks

PECFN member and Tree the County Coordinator Susan Banks has written a book for children on Wetland Plants. Each page includes one of Susan's beautiful photos and child-friendly information on the different kinds of wetlands — marshes, bogs, and swamps — and various wetland plants, including Cattails, Blue Flag Irises, and Pitcher Plants. This informative book will delight young readers.

Cost: \$15.00, available by emailing PECFNinfo@gmail.com. Wetland Plants is aimed at young children and is meant to introduce them to various types of wetlands and some of the plants that grow there.

We're excited to see **new Wildlife Crossing signs** at stretches of County roads where turtles are in peril.

Q: Why Did the Turtle Cross the Road?

A: To Reach Her Nesting Site



Female turtles return to their nesting sites in June, and this journey can be lethal when they need to cross roads. We hope that these highly visible signs will register with residents and tourists alike and that they'll brake or stop to let these creatures cross the road.

And even if you feel less enthusiasm for snakes, please respect their right to survive and avoid them on the roads, too.

PECFN's heartfelt thanks go to Adam Goheen, Director of Operations, and Albert Paschkowiak, Supervisor, Environmental Services and Sustainability, for responding to our request for installing the signs.



Blandings Turtle
photo by Ian Dickinson

Ontario Nature 's Ontario East Fall Regional Meeting November 12, 2022 was held in Milford, Prince Edward County

There were 15 representatives from Pecfn, Kingston, Ottawa, Belleville, Mississippi Valley, Lennox and Addington, Friends of Frontenac Park and Friends of Salmon River. Lesley Rudy of Ontario Nature hosted the meeting.

Nature Canada sent two representatives Samantha Cava and Hannah Dean gave a presentation on Nature Canada's campaign for a marine protected area in eastern Lake Ontario. This would be, of course, off the County's South Shore.

All of the groups gave an overview of their activities for the last few months. Amy Bodman spoke about PECFN's actions.

PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY FIELD NATURALISTS

Native trees and shrubs planted by volunteers and County staff through a Tree Canada Community grant obtained by Evan Nash, Home Hardware.

Wilkinson Memorial Park Community Tree Planting

Native trees are essential in supporting a healthy ecosystem. They improve biodiversity by providing habitat, shelter and food for small mammals, birds and insects. They give us shade and help remove carbon dioxide and harmful particles from the air.



Common Hackberry produces small berries that are enjoyed by birds. It is also a larval host to several species of butterfly.



Sugar Maple needs a hard freeze to go into dormancy. Due to climate change, Sugar Maples are growing further north.



Red Maple is the most abundant tree in North East America.



Red Mulberry is a species at risk. The fruits are edible to humans and birds.



White Oak produces edible acorns. The tree provides food for many small mammals, birds and insects.

Highbush Cranberry fruits are edible and are a food source for grouse and other birds during winter.



Pagoda Dogwood is a great wildlife tree. The berries are a popular summer food for a variety of songbirds.

This planting of 27 native trees and shrubs was initiated by Tree the County. Home Hardware was corporate sponsor for our Tree Canada Community Tree grant. Thanks go to Evan Nash, who obtained the grant for us and, along with other community volunteers and County staff, planted the trees on October 1, 2022. Enjoy all their benefits.



TREE THE COUNTY'S SECOND ANNUAL COMMUNITY TREE-PLANTING

On October 1, 2022, dozens of volunteers gathered in Wilkinson Memorial Park, N Marysburg, to plant 20 trees and shrubs.

A Home-Hardware—Tree Canada Community Grant made this possible, thanks to Evan Nash of Wellington Home Hardware. Evan did a lot more than put together the successful application. He also brought along friends and families to help plant, and a barbecue and hot dogs for all. Quite a celebration.

County Staff made park space available for planting, organized locates, made several site visits with us to advise on the best place to plant the trees, and helped on planting day with equipment and labour.

Tree Canada, who facilitate these tree-planting programs, brought along shovels, gloves, and tree-protectors, and helped dig holes too.

Tree the County initiated the application process, made site visits, recruited help and planted on the day.

In all, we planted twenty-seven native trees and shrubs, including Red, White, and Pin Oaks; Sugar, Red, and Silver Maple, Hackberries; Red Mulberries; Redbuds; Pagoda Dogwoods; High Bush Cranberries; Black Elderberries; and Serviceberries.

Trees need water to grow and flourish, especially County summers. In spring, we will organize teams to water them regularly. If you can help, please [email TreeTheCounty@gmail.com](mailto:TreeTheCounty@gmail.com).



Evan Nash hard at work



Our trees



Our volunteers

Member Sightings

A Visit from a Volunteer with the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas – Marj Seguin

Living near the northwestern corner of Prince Edward County, and surrounded by wetland, we are fortunate to see and hear many birds in a year. However, individuals who are experienced in birding will see and hear a lot more, as was confirmed for me when a volunteer with Ontario's Breeding Bird Atlas surveyed near our home. Although we live in 'the County', our sector sits within the area designated by the Atlas as Northumberland.

The volunteer who surveyed our place is responsible for three 10k x 10k quadrants within that district, counting as many bird species (by sight or by call) as he can in a season. 'Breeding bird' refers to birds who nest and breed in Ontario, as opposed to birds who pass through at various times of the year en route to a breeding ground elsewhere. In Ontario there are approximately 300 breeding bird species.

We learned that in addition to barn swallows and tree swallows (both species at risk), we have in our area rough winged swallows, which might nest in the dunes of the barrier beach nearby. The volunteer had also seen some rare warblers, and heard willow fly catchers (fitzpew! fitzpew!)

There are a number of threatened wetland birds in our area, including pied billed grebe, sora, Virginia rails, American bitterns and least bitterns. Generally we are able to hear these birds and only very rarely see them. The two years of flooding (2017 and 2019) brought (for us) a devastated submerged backyard, but also spectacular encounters with nature as water birds, fish, amphibians and wetland plants rushed in to the new sheltering shallows of our yard.

Now the plants, fish and water birds have retreated, but we can still hear in the distance the pumper-lunk, pumper-lunk of the American bittern; the call and then exhausted fading whinny of the pied-billed grebe, and the evocative occasional soft hooting of the Least Bittern, a gentle coo-coo-coo-coo.

The atlas volunteer will return to complete his survey. Each volunteer surveys an area for five years, under the direction of a regional coordinator. As with so many initiatives relating to nature, volunteers are the backbone of that endeavor.

While our place is extraordinary in nature surrounding us, the discoveries of nature really occur best when just holding still – whether on the deck of an apartment, in the woods, a city backyard, or a park.

<https://www.birdsontario.org/about/>



Photo by Dale Smith

Look who's back! the Trumpeter Swan, K46, aka Nanuuk, arrived back to the Wellington harbour in early December, almost three years to the day when I first met him in 2019.

Nanuuk hatched near Midland in 2012, or earlier, and spends the winter here in Wellington. A possible mate and two now adult plumaged swans are also present and may be Wilson, the star of the tennis ball saga of 2020, and another sibling.

Members' Sightings

A Fish Tale: The Story of Fish #213

Marjorie Seguin

We have a walking trail which, when we have a dog, is a wonderful place for doggy outings. But the scat we saw on the trail in April was not that of a dog, but of a smaller mammal. The odd thing about the scat was that it had a pink string in it. We took a closer look and discovered it wasn't a string, but rather a coated wire with a tiny phone number printed on it. We dialed the number.

We had reached Glenora Fisheries, and were told the pink wire was a fish tag. We were asked to have another look on the wire for a tracking number (see photo). Colin Lake, lead of the tagging programme, subsequently gave us a 'fish tale' – the story of Fish #213.

Fish #213 was born at Harwood Fisheries, and released into Lake Ontario at Port Hope (see photo). Before being released #213 was used as brood stock in the fish culture programme of the Ministry of Natural Resources, and tagged so that recaptures could be recorded.

Fish #213, a LaHave salmon, was 72 months old when tagged, and lived forty-nine days in the lake (swimming at least the straight line distance from Port Hope to Wellers Bay) before being caught and eaten by an animal. Either #213 washed up on the shore, and was scavenged 'post mortem', or perhaps was caught by an osprey and then dropped before being eaten, or perhaps hunted by one of the mustelids in our area – we suspect there are marten nearby, as well as otters and mink.



tagged salmon before release from the hatchery



what remained of the salmon (found in our field) after its life and then being eaten digested and expelled!!

Chimney Swifts

When the owners of Spriggen Meat Market and the new owners of the Wellington Convenience Store, Lori and Dan Sprigings, learned that the birds they had seen flying above the store were Chimney Swifts and not swallows as they had thought, they immediately agreed to make saving the chimney part of the new store renovations. Their chimney is one of the few nesting spots for Swifts left in Wellington.

In 2018, the Chimney Swift was listed as a Threatened species in Ontario. The direct threats to the Chimney Swift population are the reduced availability of their insect prey due to pesticide usage and mosquito control actions such as filling or drainage of wetlands and the availability of suitable chimneys. New safety and environmental concerns require special caps on new chimneys while many old chimneys are simply replaced or capped over. New chimneys are now too small (under 30 cm) and the interior wall is made of metal, so the bird cannot use it for roosting or nest building.

So kudos to the Sprigings for making the necessary repairs to keep this breeding site active! Stay tuned for information about how you can be a Citizen Scientist and help count these birds next summer in downtown Wellington.

Dale Smith





Photo Dale Smith



Hudgin Log House competes in the National Trust Next Great Save Competition

The Hudgin Log House on Prince Edward County's South Shore is competing in the [National Trust for Canada's](#) Next Great Save competition presented by [Ecclesiastical Insurance](#). On January 10, the National Trust announced that the Hudgin Log House is one of the top 10 short-listed heritage buildings in this Canada-wide competition: <https://nationaltrustcanada.ca/what-you-can-do/nextgreatsave>

The public will choose the winner of the \$50,000 prize. Online voting runs from January 20 to February 22. Ongoing information about the competition and our submission will be available during the voting period on the National Trust's website including a link to our project video.

The Hudgin Log House at 191 Ostrander Point Road is situated in the Hudgin-Rose Nature Reserve owned by the Nature Conservancy of Canada. The House is leased to South Shore Joint Initiative (SSJI) with its restoration managed by a SSJI sub-committee. The House achieved municipal heritage designation in 2011 due in part to its unusual cedar log construction.

Fund-raising is underway and restoration has started. The white cedar logs have been stabilized and re-chinked inside and out. Reproductions of the original windows have been constructed and installed on the main floor. A local carpenter continues with exterior door repairs, window installation on the upper floor and restoration of the gable ends. SSJI is grateful to all the donors and organizations whose generosity has allowed restoration to begin.

The restored House will offer a gathering place for school groups, community members, and environmentalists to learn about the South Shore's amazing biodiversity and unique history. It will be a place of stories – of historical use of the land, of sailing schooners crossing Lake Ontario, of Whip-poor-wills in the woods and of Blanding's Turtles in the swamps. It will be an inclusive and welcoming place for everyone.

SSJI president John Hirsch comments "we are so excited about this opportunity to achieve full funding of the Hudgin House restoration and are grateful to the National Trust and Ecclesiastical Insurance for selecting the Hudgin House for the competition."

SSJI encourages everyone in Prince Edward County to vote for the Hudgin House online in the Next Great Save competition starting on January 20. Links will be posted on social media and our web site and all communications.

South Shore Joint Initiative is led by a mission to educate and advocate for the protection, preservation and restoration of South Shore lands and near shore waters. Our vision is a permanently protected Prince Edward County South Shore where together biodiversity and people thrive. Find out more at ssji.ca

[The National Trust for Canada](http://nationaltrustcanada.ca) is an independent national charity that empowers communities to save and renew heritage places. nationaltrustcanada.ca

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In case you missed our November speaker...

MUDPUPIES, SLUGS AND PIPELINES – PECFN General Meeting, Nov. 29/22 summarized by S. Kuja

Becky Lamb introduced Fred Schueler and Aleta Karstad whom she had met last June in southern Frontenac County during a mollusc and slug outing. Becky spoke of the generous, deep knowledge that they are willing to share with anyone who is interested and explained that they have been a biologist-artist team for half a century. When not on an expedition, they reside in Bishops Mills, Ontario, spending most of their time documenting, in one way or another, everything they see, do, and think. They became Becky's personal "Nature Heroes" because they investigate areas of biodiversity that are usually over-looked and under-appreciated.

Unfortunately, Aleta was out west on a family matter but Fred very ably provided an educational and entertaining talk which was illustrated with Aleta's beautiful artwork throughout. If you want to see the full presentation use the SSJI website link - <https://youtu.be/1aHq5eEQv34>

Fred and Aleta, who describe themselves as "unemployable, nomadic, peasant scholars", have become incorporated as "Fragile Inheritance Natural History". Their presentation acts as an introduction to **a club outing to take place this winter to Kemptville Creek** since the rocky clear-water of Kemptville Creek from the dam at Oxford Mills to the Prescott Street Bridge in Kemptville is **the best place to see Mudpuppies in eastern Ontario.**

Fred explained that Mudpuppies are the only amphibians that are most active in winter – which may be a result of their producing thermal isozymes, a series of different enzymes which allow them to be active from 0 to 32 degrees. February is the month when these giant salamanders are most active and swim against the strongest currents. They come upstream and congregate under the dam where they breed. You can actually see them if you clear off the snow and look through the ice into the water below.

Other amphibians, such as frogs, hibernate in winter with only up to 15% of their nervous system active; some even freeze completely, so Mudpuppies are quite unique.

Sometimes Mudpuppy larvae mature to a reproductive stage without undergoing the normal process of metamorphosis for a land-based adult life. This condition is called "**neoteny.**" They never lose their gills, tail fins, larval skin coloration and wide heads. They also never leave the breeding pond. About half the population at Oxford Mills is neotenic or paedomorphic (retaining juvenile characteristics as a sexually mature adult).

In 1989, from information gained through the Ontario Herpetological Atlas, fishermen were reporting catching Mudpuppies while ice fishing. Fred and Aleta began studying them at the Oxford Mills dam. Since 1998 Fred and Aleta have organized a Friday Mudpuppy Night from the weekend after Thanksgiving to the spring, as long as there is enough ice and activity below the dam.

Mudpuppies haven't changed since the Jurassic when they used to be found almost everywhere in the northern hemisphere but now there are only two genera – one that lives in caves in the Balkans and the other *Necturus* that lives in streams and lakes in eastern North America, north to the arctic watershed.

We were treated to Fred singing his ode to the Mudpuppies of Oxford Mills (that he wrote and Alex Sinclair put to music). This song sums up the information that Fred and Aleta have discovered over the many years of studying them there.

Because most researchers looked at Mudpuppies during the summer, their diet was assumed to consist of isopods and arthropods, but Fred and Aleta found that in winter, tadpoles and crayfish are their main food source at Oxford Mills.

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Although Mudpuppies breed in winter, the females wait till spring to lay their eggs under rocks in the river and defend them from predators through the summer. The eggs hatch in August and grow to 2 cm with a two-line pattern on their backs but disappear into the gravel until they emerge later at about 10 cm in length.

Oxford Mills is distinctive in not having a plunge pool but flat limestone rocks that allow for ease in observing the Mudpuppies in winter. People from as far away as Vermont, where Mudpuppies are now a Species at Risk (due to lampricides used in Lake Champlain), have come to the Mudpuppy Nights where as many as 160 of these amphibians have been seen on one night.

Fred showed a slide indicating where Mudpuppies were found in Prince Edward County based on the Herp Atlas, which closed down in 2019. They often occur in fairly deep water so are tough to locate but there were several places where they have been seen both historically and in the last 20 years.

After talking about identifying Mudpuppies from the skeletal remains of their vertebral column, and searching for them particularly along beaches, Fred switched topics to tell us about Slugs and the book "Identifying Land Snails and Slugs in Canada: Introduced Species and Native Genera" by F.W. Grim, R. Forsyth, F. Schueler and A. Karstad, published by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. It is now only available (as a pdf) through Research Gate (see the end of this article). At Bishop Mills there is only one native species and one family. Ninety-nine percent of the slugs that we see are introduced from Europe and they are quite difficult to identify – even for the experts in Europe!

Basically, a slug is a snail without a shell. Several were mentioned and shown with Aleta's paintings from the book including *Deroceras reticulatum* (which has a milky slime and is the reason for holes in lettuce in the garden and on your Hosta plants), *D. leave* (the only native species, which is quite variable and aggressive), *Arion sylvaticus*, *A. subfuscus* (orange, with a lot of mucous), *A. hortensis* (with orange bellies and black backs), and *A. fasciatus* (like silly putty and very stretchy). These species were observed around Bishops Mills but the numbers often fluctuated and even disappeared for intervals and then reappeared but it isn't known why.

The final section of the presentation dealt with the proposed Energy East Pipeline that was to bring oil and tar sands products from Alberta to the east coast, mainly using a converted 50 year old gas pipeline: the same line that was used with such devastating results on the Kalamazoo River in Michigan where the pipeline broke and wiped out the native fauna and flora.

Environmental groups were urging people to "take action" which generally means "send money". Fred and Aleta, instead, decided to document, through observations and paintings at strategic locations across Canada, what species were present in the rivers the pipeline would cross prior to it being built. Fred also wrote a song and sang it, which you may want to check out on the SSJI link provided above.

They began in spring, 2014, in Ontario visiting Hoople Creek and the South Nation River, continuing to New Brunswick, studying the Tobique R; then the St. Lawrence southwest of Quebec City where a new pipeline was to cross beneath the river. At each location they described the fauna and flora they observed. They proceeded to northwestern Ontario stopping at the Eagle River Bridge, next the Assiniboine River in Manitoba, Pipestone Creek, as well as the South Saskatchewan Bluffs in Sask. and finally the Bridge to Nowhere, near Ft. McKay, in Alberta where the dust and grit from the tar sands got into Aleta's paint and paintings. Fascinating records were made all along their route, from identifying Hickorynut Mussels on the north shores of the St. Lawrence, to finding so many white mussel shells in fall along the shores near the Bluffs in Saskatchewan that they were visible from space on Google Earth: shells that had been discarded by the huge Sturgeon in the river that had eaten the mussels!

The pipeline project was cancelled because Quebec vetoed it as there would be no benefit for them but venturing across Canada had been a beautiful experience for Fred and Aleta, allowing for a random sampling of what was present in various rivers that thankfully wouldn't be impacted by an oil pipeline. Aleta did a painting at each site and they were offered for sale to finance the venture through crowd sourcing. They may be compiled in a book to document this venture. *Cont'd next page*

REQUEST from Fred Schueler to PECFN members:

- any place you can walk along the shore for a few hundred metres - pick up shells as found and photograph the collection, or photograph them *in situ*. You can get latitude & longitude by right-clicking on google maps, or from a GPS. Fresh mussel shells are the most interesting, since they indicate survival with Zebra Mussels, but everything is interesting (we have about 1K samples in what we call the Canadian Library of Drifted Material).

Fragile Inheritance Natural History - <https://fragileinheritance.ca/>

Kemptville Creek Anthem - <https://soundcloud.com/aletakarstad/kemptville-creek-anthem>

'Daily' Paintings - <http://karstaddailypaintings.blogspot.com/>

Our macro-invertebrate identification manual, and the blogs - <http://www.doingnaturalhistory.com/> - <https://adaptating.blogspot.com/> - <https://quietcuratorialtime.blogspot.com/> <https://www.oriannesociety.org/faces-of-the-forest/mudpuppies-winter-salamander/?v=400b9db48e62>

The links for the two reference books that Fred mentioned during his presentation – available as pdfs: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289377614>

[Identifying Land Snails and Slugs in Canada Introduced Species and Native Genera](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289377614)

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/364122906>

[The Earthworms Lumbricidae Megascolecidae and Sparganophilidae in Canada/link/633b4fad9cb4fe44f3ba737/](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/364122906)

OUTING: MUDPUPPY NIGHT IN OXFORD MILLS provides the public with guided tours and interpretation of native giant aquatic salamanders (by Fred Scheuler and Aleta Karstad) all winter. From Thanksgiving until spring high water you can come enjoy the best Mudpuppy viewing in Ontario and support local, environmental research, as described in the PECFN Nov. presentation summarized in this newsletter and available on the SSJI website.

Since 1998 Fred and Aleta have been taking observers to the only place in Ontario where Mudpuppies have been repeatedly observed in large numbers throughout the winter; the longest-running winter herpetological outing in Canada.

We are going to organize a PECFN outing, or more than one if necessary (max. eight people per night), on a Friday or Saturday evening in February or early March. We will carpool to take as many in a car as possible.

The evening observations begin at 7 PM but it will take approx. 2 hours to reach Kemptville and another two hours to return, so this will be a major, exciting endeavour for those who want to come. It will also be cold, so warm attire and waterproof boots are essential.

Please let Sheila (sanda.kuja@bell.net) know by Jan. 31 if you wish to participate so that we can arrange this outing. No registration fee but donations are greatly appreciated (e.g. \$100 or more for eight on a Saturday evening).